Market Anarchist Plus: Our Plan of Work (Second Edition)

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Notes: This piece is part of a series on "red mutualism." Read more here.

Market anarchism, as defined by Center for a Stateless Society, is the "advocacy of replacing the state with civil society while pointing to free market economics to explain the workability and/or desirability of such." This ideology has very rarely if ever supported a sizable movement on its own and instead has, according to Charles Johnson and Gary Chartier in their introduction to *Markets Not Capitalism*,

As such, market anarchists are uniquely positioned to cross over into many political camps fluidly. But while working with allies among say post-left individualist anarchists and radical libertarians is extremely important, it is becoming increasingly clear that one of the only realistic scenarios for survival in a hyper-capitalist dystopia in the midst of climate collapse centers on mobilizing the *economically* dispossessed mass of society. This is not just "the proletariat" but rather, as Antonio Negri puts it, all those "who are put to work inside society to create profit…" to the benefit, I will add, of only a tiny segment of people in power and the detriment of our fragile, finite planet. This "multitude" are the many victims of exploitation by bosses, landlords, and patriarchs; land theft and commons enclosure; usurious debt entrapment; taxation that benefits corporate power and state violence; and ultimately, as Benjamin Tucker outlines, "the fact that one class of men are dependent for their living upon the sale of their labor, while another class of men are relieved of the necessity of labor by being legally privileged to sell something that is not labor." As such, we should look to coordinate with not just social anarchists but the larger socialist struggle to mobilize and liberate the working class(es). We can exclude crypto-fascist elements among Marxist-Leninists just as we exclude those elements among libertarians, but—even if numbers is not the primary precondition for social change—there simply aren't enough of us leftover to not network as widely as possible to liberate ourselves from this apocalyptic global economic system built on violence and extraction.

This is not an ahistorical effort either (if you'll allow me a bit of a literature review)! Though later individualists like Tucker would become harsh critics of both state socialism and many forms of social anarchism, the overlap between them was more positively perceived by his predecessors Josiah Warren and William B. Greene. The former, according to mutualist historical and archivist Shawn P. Wilbur,

> affiliated with Section 26, of Philadelphia, of the International Workingmen's Association. Warren was certainly not the only individualist anarchist who took an interest in the I. W. A., and participated to some extent in the activities of its American sections. William B. Greene has been [sic] the primary author of an *Address of the Internationals*, issued by Boston's French-speaking Section 1, and published by the Heywoods' Co-operative publishing Company. Various others, such as Joshua King Ingalls and Lewis Masquerier, are supposed to have been affiliated.

There was also a "faction around Victoria Woodhull and Stephen Pearl Andrews." Then, of course, they "made enough of a nuisance of themselves that they were effectively purged from the International by Marx's faction even before he dealt with Bakunin." It would not be until the next century, in the 1960s, that market-oriented anarchism and state-abolitionist libertarianism reconnected with its roots in the socialist left. It was then that not only did Murray Rothbard pursue active collaboration with the New Left, but many of his contemporaries like Karl Hess and Samuel Edward Konkin III brought a particularly anti-capitalist bent to the state-abolitionist free-market economics of the Austrian School of

> hung out with the Black Panthers. He started talking about "community" and about the concerns of "workers" and about the ways in which giant corporations, and the corporate lifestyle and the corporate mindset, menace and victimize ordinary, hardworking Americans.

In contrast, Rothbard would eventually abandon the left entirely in favor of appealing to conservatives and other reactionaries alongside Lew Rockwell—ultimately laying the groundwork for the infamous "libertarian-to-alt-right pipeline"—but left-libertarians, neo-mutualists, and market anarchists today exist in part because of these cross-ideological but still socialistic collaborations.

But of course the specter of unity haunts the radical left, and for many "left unity" is an extremely dirty word. Among anarchists, things can be tense but more often than not cordial; hence why I am focusing less specifically in this article on "anarchist synthesis." While some social anarchists might go so far as to dismiss market-based individualist anarchism and mutualism as unserious or too attached to anarcho-capitalism and its discontents, most of the time we put aside our differences and create some pretty amazing things—anywhere from establishing a local squat to defending a full-on autonomous zone. In fact, many of Tucker's individualist contemporaries like Voltairine de Cleyre and Dyer Lum became more and more sympathetic to anarcho-communism and syndicalism as they developed politically; eventually coming to an anarchism without adjectives approach. With Marxists and other state socialists… things are more difficult. Ever since Marx and Engels publicly ridiculed Max Stirner and expelled Bakunin from the First International (or I.W.A.); the USSR destroyed the Free Territory of Ukraine, crushed the local autonomy of Soviet workers, and helped betray the Catalonian anarchists; and all the other backstabbing and sabotages of the last few centuries, there has been an obvious and understandable mistrust of state socialists by anarchists.

Considering this history (and the need to respect human dignity and freedom), I'm not suggesting we play ball with armchair Stalinists, DPRK fetishists, and genocide apologists, and I give a grave warning to anyone thinking of partnering with someone more interested in their particular party, org, theory, or brand than actual change. I *am* suggesting that we put aside certain ideological assumptions in our real-world struggle for liberation and approach most other socialists as potential comrades—a sort of personalism lacking in so much leftist infighting. After all, whether it's an abusive 'anarchist' polycule or power-hungry tankies taking over a socialist party, shitty tyrannical people are a cross-ideological phenomenon. Conversely many Marxists and Marxist-influenced folks I have worked with (demsoc types, Wolff-ite cooperativists, left-communists, latter-day De Leonists, and even some self-proclaimed Leninists) are in their praxis closer to autonomist Marxists: that is, utilizing a Marxist analysis to build worker power and autonomy in the present and immediate future while expanding their sphere of concern beyond orthodox boundaries of worker and non-worker (i.e. students, homemakers, the unemployed). It is from this basis that we need to learn to work together as networks of people under particular material conditions to create

A lesson could perhaps be taken from state socialists themselves: One of the most interesting things to emerge from the Communist Party of the United States is the idea of "communist plus." Pioneered in the 1980s by Gus Hall and Henry Winston as continuation of some of Vladimir Lenin's ideas, the plus is, as Joe Sims writes, "a unique thing that Marxists add to all struggles" like unionism, "housing, police murder, health care, [and] the environment." Specifically this "means employing a class analysis; . . . seeing that it's all interconnected; . . . fighting for unity. A class analysis means understanding that capitalism's problems are rooted in a system of economic exploitation." It therefore falls upon communists to participate in anti-racist, feminist, environmentalist, etc. struggles not only by showing up as a body but also by bringing an intersectional class analysis to the table that will facilitate seeing any 'single-issue' struggle as part of a larger struggle against capitalism; a realization that will hopefully lead to unity amongst all those struggling. In many ways, my own thinking is a product of this effort by Marxists for the last 40 years, as it has led me, a wholehearted anarchist, to utilize a Marxian analysis in even the most libertarian of circles and even propose this 'unity' based on ending economic exploitation. We, as market anarchists, need to engage in a similar strategy of 'open entryism.' We *already do* whenever we participate in labor, socialist feminist, radical anti-racist, and anti-capitalist environmentalist struggles not just to sway them in our direction but to provide our insights to ensure the success of particular projects. This isn't just a proposal, it's an observation! Some things we bring are:

- The standard anarchist additions to leftist discourse: i.e. the state is both immoral and unhelpful; socialism without liberty is tyranny; evolutionary cooperation defines us as much as class struggle; humanity thrives through consent and free association; etc.
- An awareness that, despite the arguments by vulgar libertarians and socialists alike, capitalism is not identical to the free market. In fact, as Alex Aragona argues, "we live within systems of state-capitalism with small pockets of free market activity, rather than the reverse."
- Arguments emerging from that understanding which identify non-captured markets as effective for redistribution and other socialistic outcomes; like Kevin Carson's point that genuinely free market competition "socializes progress" and ultimately results "in a society resembling not the anarcho-capitalist vision of a world owned by the Koch brothers and Halliburton, so much as Marx's vision of a communist society of abundance."
- Analyses of human beings rooted in market insights but not restricted to them. For example: considerations of the Hayekian knowledge problems inherent in economic coordination and how they apply both to planned socialist economies and large capitalist corporations; or how, as Frank Miroslav argues, collective action problems are not simply capitalist propaganda but a game-theoretic reality to be accounted for.

open systems and open spaces" (pg. 61).

Further, while David Bell positions the communist plus "plan of work" as preparing "people for the Party," market anarchists can and do work to counter this pressure within the same movements. Libertarians (left or otherwise) are acutely aware that there are always parties and allying with them has varied effectiveness (often based on the scale of the party in question; local tends to work better), but there is no mythical *Party* coming to save the world. All revolutionary parties—with perhaps the exception of Cuba—have failed or been co-opted into global capitalist hegemony. We need then to put our anarchist insights toward countering the abstraction of *the Party* and the centralized authoritarian tendencies that come with it. This was essentially the course taken by 19th century Tuckerite labor organizer Joseph Labadie, who Carson describes as…

> much more actively sympathetic to organized labor than Tucker. He started out as a writer for several Detroit socialist and labor papers, and maintained his relations with them after he became a regular contributor to Liberty. Labadie attempted to bridge the gap between Tucker's individualism and the labor movement, first with the Knights of Labor, and then with the quasi-syndicalism of the I.W.W. He argued, within organs of the labor movement, against democratic socialist and parliamentary approaches, and may have contributed to the anti-political tendencies behind the formation of the Wobblies.

In this same manner we need to push socialists of all stripes away from overreliance on parties—whether democratic or revolutionary—and toward more direct action and decentralized anti-capitalist struggle and experimentation primarily by participating in common struggles and, through that, demonstrating the efficacy of our ideas.

To call this approach a form of "left unity" would be correct but somewhat misleading; but to be fair, the term "left unity" is itself inherently misleading. C4SS scholar Spooky identifies two different forms of unity often conflated: tactical unity and ideological unity. The first is "a largely decentralized strategy for responding to spontaneous threats, and in the second" Spooky is "describing the tools for building an organized, explicitly political movement." And while the former of these involves bridging ideological gaps between various kinds of socialists, the latter means…

> responding to immediate systemic threats is a higher priority than reconciling a philosophical disagreement, leading to collaboration between a diverse group of individuals against a common danger; this process is not planned, it doesn't have formal membership or rules, and there's no vetting process for who gets to be an anti-fascist for that moment.

Spooky argues that this tactical unity is powerful and necessary because it transcends "the limitations of organized political structures in favor of decentralized, spontaneous responses to threats, both from state and non-state actors," however, "[f]ocusing on the absence of

market anarchist plus comes in.

As opposed to abandoning the project of bridging ideological differences, we instead focus on actual material issues: 'How do people get food in their mouths? How do people find shelter? Do people have control over their own lives? Are ecosystems being sustained' [1]? The responses to these questions can take varied approaches: community-owned grocery stores, housing co-ops, squatting, radical municipalism, revolutionary unionism, community self-defense, forest defense, land back, free health clinics, community land trusts, public utility cooperatives, mutual aid, and more. Most socialists—state or otherwise—I have encountered (offline) are interested in these efforts; market anarchists are no exception. Coming together to work on these issues does not require us to put aside ideology or necessarily, as Spooky laments, "moderating our own rhetoric in exchange for mainstream approval." Instead we bring intelligent anarchistic and market-based insights to these projects in order to improve their viability and positive effectiveness. For example, instead of (at least left-)agorists drawing a harsh line between their and (at least libertarian) Marxists' class theories, perhaps we come to realize through engaging in local class struggle efforts (Konkin approved of the IWW after all) that state legibility is an essential tool of controlling the working class and, as such, we need to disengage from state structures in order to more effectively build worker power. Further, the counter-economy is where cooperatives go to thrive free from state-capitalist regulatory norms, making them much more viable as genuine forms of "communization" (especially via "venture communism") and, eventually, a *polycentric* social ownership of the means of production. Work like this is not a pure "tactical unity" that only focuses on opposition instead of end goals, but instead asks of us to engage in the dialectical method—both in terms of discourse and adaptation to local contexts—in order to find reasonable and liberatory solutions to real problems in the context of lived, material worlds.

And more, insights from market economics tell us that we don't necessarily need the same end goals in order to create positive and collaborative social change. Drawing from Friedrich Hayek's work, "free-market communist" Eugene Holland points out in his book *Nomad Citizenship* that…

> groups of people with different aims are not "necessarily enemies" because each group presupposes a common purpose: people become enemies mainly when the means to realize their aims are scarce, whether they share ultimate ends or not (pg. 107).

The solution to such an issue lies in mutually beneficial trade put toward different ends; the resulting dynamics are, in contrast to planned "economies" like corporations or households, is a "catallaxy" which...

> forms a self-organizing multiplicity that operates through the horizontal coordination of multiple agents, each of whom uses minor knowledge to act independently yet in close relation to neighboring agents, and all of whom together form a nondenumerable

Bookchin), or any combination thereof (the binary is inherently unsustainable)—and networking between localities in order to give people greater autonomy and cooperative control over the circumstances of their daily lives. Take a note from the Pan-African Solidarity Alliance, where revolutionary cooperativists Community Movement Builders in the U.S. and grassroots socialist party Pati Kan Pèp in Haiti are working to establish "real resource and political exchanges to build the needed international solidarity structure necessary to build a real alliance, a real political vision and the calling of the International." This is a glimpse at the kind of catallaxy that could grow from disparate groups collaborating and ultimately draw together a plurality of leftists into a revolutionary "marketplace of ideas." This in turn is very much in line with the unorthodox Marxist approach to counter-power outlined by Negri and Micheal Hart in their book *Multitude*, in which they call for "networked organization" as the modern alternative to vanguardism and Leninist-style centralism for resisting Empire. This form of organization "is based on the *continuing* plurality of its elements and its networks of communication in such a way that reduction to a centralized and unified command structure is impossible." Ultimately "there is no center, only an irreducible plurality of nodes in communication with each other" (pg. 82-3).

And again what is essential to tie these disparate struggles together is the dialectical focus on real, local contexts [2]. This means not being bogged down by ideological difference and instead focusing on real-world change. Kali Akuno, one of the founders of Cooperation Jackson, articulates this well at an event hosted by the CIIS Anthropology and Social Change program by arguing that...

> anarchists, socialists, communists, revolutionary nationalists, and folks who are invested in a radical Indigenous worldview . . . need to be invested in a common set of shared practices with each other and coordinate our work to the greatest extent possible so we get into the habit of, you know, acting our way into new ways of thinking.

Take a look at the efforts in the autonomous region of Rojava within Northern Syria to see what this sort of collaborative approach can lend. Certainly there is great debate and criticism amongst Marxist and social anarchists alike about whether or not Rojava is properly engaging in class warfare, the abolition of the state, or any other number of issues [3]; and yet, as anarcho-syndicalist Karl Blythe points out, though "[t]he political program put forward might be decentralist with strong potentialities towards social democracy rather than anti-statist and social revolutionary" anarcho-syndicalists should still support "the self defense of the everyday masses and their own organizations of struggle in Rojava against ISIS, local states and western imperialism..." while looking to the "libertarian openings in the region" (Blythe's primary example being the "women's movement"). It is from an open-ended basis like this that radicals ranging from queer anarchists in The Queer Insurrection and Liberation Army (TQILA) to communists from the Marxist–Leninist Communist Party (of Turkey) have come as internationalist fighters to defend this autonomous cooperative market economy with a highly decentralized and participatory government apparatus. Good-faith socialists/leftists—including market anarchists—can and do work to expand this kind of autonomy outward and

ideological cross-pollination is essential for the survival of the left. This is the reason for much of my work on historical materialism and its usefulness for left-libertarians.

2. My use of "dialectical" here (and throughout this piece) is largely based on Chris Matthew Sciabarra definition of dialectics as "the art of context-keeping. It counsels us to study the object of our inquiry from a variety of perspectives and levels of generality, so as to gain a more comprehensive picture of it."
3. To get a glimpse of the debate, see "In Rojava: People's War is not Class War" from the International Communist Tendency and "'Rojava Revolution'? 'Anti-State'? 'Anti-Capitalist'? Or a new mystification?" by the group Class War.

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